CATCHING UP TO THE CORE:
COMMON SENSE STRATEGIES FOR ACCELERATING ACCESS TO THE COMMON CORE IN CALIFORNIA
Catching Up to the Core: Common Sense Strategies for Accelerating Access to the Common Core in California

BY LINDSEY STUART, ALEXANDRA AYLWARD, AND JEANNETTE LAFORS

Historically, California has been a leader in standards-based education reform. The state’s K-12 standards are some of the strongest in the nation. In 2010, the State Board of Education joined 45 other states and the District of Columbia in adopting the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Then in 2011, the board began collaborating with the 24 other states belonging to the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter Balanced) to develop a student assessment system aligned to the CCSS.

Through these steps, California policymakers acknowledged the need for a new set of standards and assessments that aligned to national and international measures of college and career readiness. They also positioned the state to take, once again, a leading role in implementing standards-based education reform. Yet, our review of CCSS implementation suggests that rather than build upon its history of leadership, California has lagged behind other states, leaving hundreds of districts and thousands of schools without meaningful support. While a number of pioneering California districts have sought to fill this vacuum with their own efforts, many more are waiting for leadership from the state department of education.

The failure of state leadership to accelerate Common Core implementation will have serious consequences for millions of California students. The CCSS establish expectations for mathematics and language arts that are calibrated to college and career readiness, and are aligned to new state assessments coming online in 2014-15. Failing to prepare for these changes through broad-based professional development, instructional materials alignment, improvements in district and school technology infrastructure, and alignment with higher education will cause millions of California students to fall farther behind their peers in other states. For low-income, Latino, African-American, and English learner students, who constitute the vast majority of our student population, the state’s failure to provide them access to high-quality, standards-based instruction will leave them even more unprepared for college and the workplace.

In this paper, we examine the consequences of California’s lagging implementation of the Common Core. We highlight the benefits of the CCSS, and offer recommendations to accelerate California’s progress based on promising strategies being used in other states and some California districts. By adopting these recommendations, California’s education leaders can accelerate the pace of Common Core implementation and give our students a real shot at finishing high school prepared to accomplish their college and career dreams.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS: DEEPER, MORE RIGOROUS, AND COMPARABLE ACROSS STATES

To succeed in college and today’s workplace, California students must have access to rigorous academic standards and high-quality instruction. The economic imperative is clear: nearly 80 percent of jobs require postsecondary education or training. To fill workplace needs over the next two decades,
California will need 2.3 million more college degrees and technical certificates than it is currently projected to produce. We simply cannot meet these economic needs without improving college and career outcomes for our low-income, Latino, and African-American students.

The research- and evidence-based CCSS have the potential to help our schools elevate the academic performance of all students while also addressing the pervasive gaps that separate students. Developed by teachers, school administrators, postsecondary educators, and content experts, the CCSS define the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing college courses and in workforce training programs. The CCSS build upon the recognized strengths of the California state standards, while also offering specific improvements, including:

- **Reducing the number of standards:** In 2010, nearly two-thirds of California teachers indicated that the state had too many content standards, which inhibited teachers from delving deeply into the concepts outlined in the standards frameworks; and 45 percent reported the state’s standards were not clear enough. The CCSS are streamlined and focused on depth of content knowledge rather than breadth. Instead of the “mile-wide and inch-deep” curricula that both overwhelm teachers and predispose students to grasp only a superficial understanding of critical concepts, the CCSS are designed to support project-based learning and differentiated instruction. Instead of rushing through curriculum to cover the standards, teachers can focus on teaching key concepts and providing both additional supports to struggling students and enrichment to accelerated learners.

- **Increasing academic rigor:** The CCSS demand more academic rigor of students, provide improved precision about the integration and progression of content and skills across the grade levels, and promote greater depth and breadth of reading materials than the state’s current standards. For example, the English language arts (ELA) and literacy standards demand that literacy be taught across subject areas and that content and skills spiral up through the grade levels in a logical progression. Because the CCSS are benchmarked to college and 21st century career expectations, they should support a more streamlined transition to college, which in turn should reduce the number of students required to take costly, and often ineffective, remedial courses upon entering postsecondary institutions.

- **Increasing the emphasis on content-rich nonfiction and academic language:** The CCSS align with the demands students are likely to meet in college and the workplace. For the more than 1.4 million English learners (ELs) in California, the CCSS signal a fundamental shift in expectations that demand more sophisticated language use. In Orange County’s Santa Ana Unified School District, CCSS implementation plans deliberately focus on supporting English learners, with teachers collaborating to create unit and lesson plans in partnership with experts in the EL field. Table 1 summarizes the key instructional shifts teachers of the state’s more than 6 million students will need to make so their curriculum and practice align with the Common Core.

- **Allowing for cross-state comparability, portability, and resource sharing:** The CCSS allow policymakers, educators, and community members to compare student performance against the same set of standards across states. Consistent expectations across the country will also help create greater stability for students and/or teachers who move from one state to another. Because states will be working from the same set of standards, stakeholders can leverage broad-based sharing of best practices, instructional materials, and professional development. This type of collective knowledge sharing can result in significant cost savings. For example, educational leaders from Massachusetts, New York, and Rhode Island are collaborating across state lines to develop high-quality, CCSS-aligned instructional and professional development materials.

**Table 1: Key instructional shifts required by the CCSS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Language Arts and Literacy</th>
<th>Mathematics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More informational texts: Building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction</td>
<td>Greater focus: Fewer topics at greater depth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less text-to-self analyses: Reading, writing, and speaking grounded in evidence from text</td>
<td>Coherent progression through grade levels: Each standard is an extension of prior learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fewer adapted texts: Regular practice with complex texts</td>
<td>More emphasis on conceptual understanding of key concepts, while also maintaining focus on procedural skill and fluency in calculation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All teachers more explicitly responsible for literacy: Emphasis on literacy and use of academic language across content areas</td>
<td>More integration of math in science and technical subjects: Flexibly applying math in context and within other content areas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
STANDARDS IN ACTION: HOW CURRENT CALIFORNIA CONTENT STANDARDS AND TASKS COMPARE TO THE CCSS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

The content standards currently used in California describe discrete sub-skills that, if added together, presumably will lead to increased reading comprehension. In contrast, the CCSS not only define a grade-by-grade “staircase” of increasing text complexity, but also demand that students show a “steadily growing ability to discern more from and make fuller use of texts, including making an increasing number of connections among ideas and between texts.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>California ELA Content Standards (1997): Literary Response and Analysis (Standard 3.0)</th>
<th>CCSS for ELA and Literacy (2010): Reading Standards for Literature, Key Ideas, and Details (Standard RL.K/4/9.3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>Distinguish fantasy from realistic text.</td>
<td>With prompting and support, identify characters, settings, and major events in a story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth grade</td>
<td>Describe the structural differences of various imaginative forms of literature, including fantasies, fables, myths, legends, and fairy tales.</td>
<td>Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character’s thoughts, words, or actions).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ninth grade</td>
<td>Articulate the relationship between the expressed purposes and the characteristics of different forms of dramatic literature (e.g., comedy, tragedy, drama, dramatic monologue).</td>
<td>Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To teach to these standards, educators will need to shift from teaching rote tasks designed to assess discrete skills and narrow content knowledge to instructing students to closely read complex texts and engage in academic discourse about their content. In addition, students must engage in more persuasive and explanatory writing than the simpler narrative writing assigned to California students over the last two decades. The chart below compares a typical classroom task aligned to the current ninth-grade California standards with a CCSS task developed by teachers in another state.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Typical Task based on California ELA Content Standard: Literary Response and Analysis</th>
<th>Example Task developed for CCSS for ELA and Literacy: Literature, Key Ideas, and Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ninth grade</td>
<td>In To Kill a Mockingbird, Atticus states that it is his moral obligation to defend Tom Robinson: “...before I can live with other folks I’ve got to live with myself. The one thing that doesn’t abide by majority rule is a person’s conscience.” What does it mean to have integrity, honesty, or a conscience? How important are these characteristics? Tell about a time when you have noticed someone behaving according to their moral conscience, integrity, or a lack thereof.</td>
<td>How does Harper Lee use characters and events in To Kill a Mockingbird to define courage? After reading Part One of To Kill a Mockingbird, write an essay that defines courage and explains how three different characters show courage. Support your discussion with evidence from the text(s). What conclusions or implications can you draw?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IMPLEMENTING THE COMMON CORE EQUITABLY AND EFFECTIVELY

Clearly, instruction in California schools must change to meet the demands of the Common Core. That change will not happen on its own; it requires strong leadership and support from the state. In particular, state leaders must address a variety of interrelated policies, including:

1. Professional Development Content and Delivery: Prepare teachers across the state to teach to the new standards.
2. Instructional Supports and Materials Alignment to the CCSS: Ensure high quality CCSS-aligned basic and supplemental instructional materials are available in all districts and schools.
3. Implementation Costs and Technology Infrastructure: Address the costs associated with implementation, including technology costs associated with expanding infrastructure and capacity.
4. Alignment of the CCSS with Higher Education: Align systems of higher education with the CCSS, particularly around teacher preparation programs and credentialing requirements.

Over the past two years, state leaders have characterized these core elements of CCSS implementation as insurmountable barriers and used them as excuses for inaction. And although momentum has begun to increase, the California Department of Education (CDE) has been slow to engage meaningfully in implementation efforts that prepare educators for the instructional shifts of the CCSS, slow to inform the general public, and slow to ensure that core and supplementary instructional materials meet rigorous criteria. (For more details on California’s implementation efforts, see “Implementation of the CCSS: California’s Progress to Date” on page 8.)

In contrast, numerous states and pioneering California districts have addressed each of these areas in ways that should inform California’s plans and allow the state’s 6 million students to fully access the benefits of the Common Core. In the absence of state leadership, implementation will be slow and uneven, leaving students in many districts without the opportunity to access and master the new standards.
Comparative Timelines of CCSS Implementation

In contrast to California, other states more quickly aligned myriad policies related to the CCSS, created coherent systems of professional development, and initiated collaborations with other states to benefit from economies of scale. For example, the New York State Education Department made curriculum units, modules, and other educator resources available in the summer of 2012. And at the start of the 2012-13 academic year, all ELA and math instruction across New York state is expected to align to the Common Core. It took two years for the California Department of Education (CDE) to develop an implementation plan, but it took only three months for Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD) to convene stakeholders and draft an implementation plan.

**FIGURE 1: Comparative Timelines of CCSS Implementation in California, New York, and Sacramento Unified School District**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>California CCSS Implementation</th>
<th>New York State CCSS Implementation</th>
<th>Sacramento City Unified School District CCSS Implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2010-11</strong></td>
<td><strong>2011-12</strong></td>
<td><strong>2012-13</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AUGUST 2010</strong></td>
<td><strong>MARCH 2012</strong></td>
<td><strong>NOVEMBER 2012</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California State Board of Education (SBE) adopts CCSS</td>
<td>California SBE approves CCSS Systems Implementation Plan</td>
<td>New English Language Development Standards adopted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>JUNE 2011</strong></td>
<td><strong>JUNE 2011</strong></td>
<td><strong>MAY 2013</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California joins Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium</td>
<td>NY Board of Regents adopts CCSS</td>
<td>Mathematics curriculum frameworks adoption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUMMER 2011</strong></td>
<td><strong>SUMMER 2011</strong></td>
<td><strong>SEPTEMBER 2013</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NY State Education Department launches “Engage NY” website, making available preliminary curriculum resources</td>
<td>NY Board of Regents approves new set of Pre-K standards</td>
<td>CDE professional learning modules to be completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OCTOBER 2010</strong></td>
<td><strong>JANUARY 2011</strong></td>
<td><strong>JANUARY 2011</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder group writes district implementation plan</td>
<td>NY Board of Regents approves new set of Pre-K standards</td>
<td>Curriculum-based PD aligned with CCSS occurs for all teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NOVEMBER 2010-APRIL 2011</strong></td>
<td><strong>AUGUST 2011</strong></td>
<td><strong>AUGUST 2011</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal orientation</td>
<td>Curriculum-based PD aligned with CCSS occurs for all teachers</td>
<td>Curriculum-based PD aligned with CCSS occurs for all teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2011-12</strong></td>
<td><strong>2012-13</strong></td>
<td><strong>2013-14</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers implement at least 1 CCSS-aligned unit</td>
<td>Full implementation in grades 3-8</td>
<td>Full implementation in high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State curriculum modules available for ELA and math (including scope and sequence, performance tasks, and lesson plans)</td>
<td>Ongoing CCSS rollout and PD</td>
<td>Online PD available for curriculum modules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>JANUARY 2011</strong></td>
<td><strong>FEBRUARY 2012</strong></td>
<td><strong>FEBRUARY 2012</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NY Board of Regents approves new set of Pre-K standards</td>
<td>CCSS-aligned assessments used</td>
<td>Intensive training on PARCC assessments and alignment to curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AUGUST 2011</strong></td>
<td><strong>FEBRUARY 2012</strong></td>
<td><strong>FEBRUARY 2012</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum-based PD aligned with CCSS occurs for all teachers</td>
<td>CCSS-aligned assessments used</td>
<td>CCSS-aligned assessments used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2012-13</strong></td>
<td><strong>2013-14</strong></td>
<td><strong>2014-2015</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohort B (19 schools) ELA Teacher PD Leadership development</td>
<td>Intensive PD with Cohort B ELA, facilitated by teacher leaders from Cohort A</td>
<td>Leadership Team PD at remaining schools PD on math CCSS begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2014-2015 School Year</strong></td>
<td><strong>2014-2015 School Year</strong></td>
<td><strong>2014-2015 School Year</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCSS ASSESSMENTS EXPECTED</td>
<td>CCSS ASSESSMENTS EXPECTED</td>
<td>CCSS ASSESSMENTS EXPECTED</td>
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</table>
1. Professional Development Content and Delivery

Teachers are by far the most important in-school factor in determining student success and school improvement. The potential of the CCSS will only be realized by strengthening educators’ capacity to provide standards-based instruction that emphasizes critical thinking skills and pushes all students towards achieving greater depths of understanding.

Absent clear information about what the Common Core standards require and without supports to ensure the implementation of rigorous expectations, teachers may struggle to adequately and equitably implement the standards. Research and experience confirm that poor students and students of color are more likely than their more advantaged peers to receive low-level assignments. Having rigorous standards does not guarantee California’s high-need students can access or master them, and if students do not master them, such standards are meaningless.

Nevertheless, the state must play a more active role in ensuring teachers are receiving the high-quality professional development they need to incorporate the new standards into their instructional practice. Throughout the nation, districts and states are leveraging CCSS implementation as a mechanism for pedagogical reform, replacing the one-time workshop and episodic professional development with sustained opportunities to build educators’ content knowledge and improve instruction.

Unfortunately, in California, these efforts are scattered among the state’s 1000 districts, leaving most districts and schools on their own. To ensure equity, educators in large and small districts should have extensive opportunities for targeted professional development that help them fully grasp the demands of the CCSS; plan lessons and deliver instruction that are aligned with the CCSS; and evaluate student learning through the use of formative and interim assessments.

Lessons for California:

Teachers can be trained quickly and effectively using a modularized, regionalized, and/or online approach.

PROMISING PRACTICES IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONTENT AND DELIVERY

SACRAMENTO CITY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Immediately following state adoption of the CCSS in 2010, district leaders in Sacramento City Unified School District began collaborating with a group of stakeholders, including teachers, principals, parents, students, and representatives of local higher education institutions to map out a district-wide implementation plan. To cope with budget constraints, the district initiated a staged implementation of the CCSS, beginning with the standards for English language arts.

In the first year, principals and volunteer teachers used the district’s existing process of data inquiry and analysis to begin implementing the Common Core ELA and literacy standards. In the summer of 2011, they expanded this work to a second cohort of teachers in 19 schools. The teacher leaders from these two cohorts are now playing a leadership role in the next phase of implementation that includes professional development for the ELA teachers in the remaining schools. Meanwhile, they are also preparing for Common Core math professional development in 2012-13. Through this process, they have identified high-quality professional development tools from other states. In addition, through SCUSD’s membership in the California Office to Reform Education (CORE) collaborative, they are developing Common Core-aligned classroom tasks that can be used by teachers in districts throughout the state.

OHIO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

To ensure equitable implementation of the CCSS across the state, the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) built a regionalized professional development model. In fall 2011, ODE began training math and ELA teachers directly, reaching thousands of additional teachers through regional “train-the-trainer” offerings. During the 2010-11 school year, trained regional staff facilitated statewide stakeholder outreach and professional development to increase awareness and understanding of the standards and model curricula. Subsequently during 2011-12, the regional professional development focused on generating a deep understanding of the standards, as well as spurring instructional and curriculum revision. In following years, the regionalized professional development will target specific content areas, grade levels, and teachers of specific populations, including English learners, students with disabilities, and gifted and talented students. This regionalized professional development also will extend to higher education faculty.

GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The Georgia Department of Education is providing high-quality professional development through technology. They have partnered with Georgia Public Broadcasting to produce professional learning video sessions of grade-level ELA, mathematics, history/social studies, science, and technical subject standards. The site also incorporates viewer feedback to both monitor and improve the quality of the professional development. To verify participation, teachers receive a certificate.
2. Instructional Supports and Materials Alignment to the CCSS

The state has a responsibility to provide or direct teachers to instructional supports and materials that are aligned to the CCSS. Educators will need comprehensive, well-organized, quality resources that don’t just tell them what standards to teach but offer support with how to teach them. Although the state’s curriculum frameworks are intended to guide educators in curriculum development, the state must provide more resources for teachers and students in districts without the capacity to create strong instructional supports from these frameworks. Inequitable resources too often translate to inequitable instruction, and students — disproportionately low-income students, English learners, and other students of color — pay the price.

As more open-source materials become available and as vendors pitch new materials “aligned to the Core,” the CDE must develop processes to gauge the quality of instructional and supplementary materials. The CDE must ensure quality control on the selection of curricular and supplementary content based on evidence of effectiveness. The state could partner with other states or content-area experts to create a product review center that houses only the highest quality materials.

Lessons for California:

There is a wealth of instructional materials being created in California and across the country; the state should act as an arbiter of quality.

PROMISING PRACTICES IN INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORTS AND MATERIALS

CALIFORNIA OFFICE TO REFORM EDUCATION (CORE)

The eight school districts belonging to the California Office to Reform Education (CORE) — Clovis, Fresno, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Oakland, Sacramento City, San Francisco, and Sanger Unified School Districts — are collaborating to develop a set of CCSS-aligned modules, alongside experts in the field. These modules consist of formative assessment tasks for use in the classroom, scoring rubrics, teacher directions, and student work examples. This cohort of teacher and district leaders returned home to replicate this process and develop additional modules for field testing. CORE districts planned to pilot these modules during the fall of 2012 and will provide these performance task modules in an open-source context so that they are available for non-CORE district leaders and teachers.

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The largest school district in the country, the New York City Department of Education, created an online Common Core Library that houses a number of instructional resources for educators, including CCSS-aligned tasks embedded within units of study for K-12 literacy and math. Each unit includes rubrics, annotated student work (including an interactive process where users can compare different levels of work), and instructional supports for English learners and students with disabilities. A virtual training video accompanies the modules. The Department has also created a document that specifies instructional expectations for the current school year and has linked professional development to these expectations.

MULTI-STATE ALLIANCE: SHARED LEARNING COLLABORATIVE

Five states – New York, Illinois, Massachusetts, North Carolina, and Colorado – are working through the Shared Learning Collaborative (SLC) to develop and pilot a comprehensive set of open platform resources. Delaware, Kentucky, Georgia, and Louisiana will join in early 2013, and based on the lessons learned in the pilot program, the goal is to make the services available to all interested states. Coordinated by the Council of Chief State School Officers, the goal is to provide teachers with high-quality, CCSS-aligned materials, such as teacher-delivered lessons, self-paced online courses, educational games, video lectures, online tutoring, simulations, and group projects. The SLC is also building the technology infrastructure to allow states and districts to integrate student data that currently exist in different systems and formats and make it available to such applications as data dashboards, which display student data in a simple and easy-to-use format.
3. Implementation Costs and Technology Infrastructure

Estimates of the cost of CCSS implementation vary depending on how California chooses to approach professional development delivery methods and materials adoption. In terms of CCSS-aligned instructional materials, costs will be offset by access to a national market of materials and greater price competition. These costs can also be mitigated by repurposing funds. For example, dollars used to buy traditional textbooks could be redirected to professional development opportunities as many instructional materials will be available as open-source materials.

The greatest cost of implementation will likely come from ensuring that all schools have reliable technology infrastructure for online assessments in 2014-15. To ensure that all schools have the elements necessary to be able to test all eligible test-takers within the state’s testing window, schools must have sufficient and secure bandwidth, an appropriate number of secured computers available for testing, dependable equipment, and technologically competent staff. Unfortunately, California schools have varying levels of use of, and capacity for, both computers and bandwidth.

As a first step toward addressing concerns associated with deploying online assessments, 42 percent of schools have reported how well-equipped they are for administering the Smarter Balanced assessments using the Web-based “Technology Readiness Tool.” The data collected indicate that respondents have serious concerns about the capacity and expertise of their schools’ technology support staff. It remains unclear how the state and districts will act on the findings of the survey.

While it is a priority for all California schools to have the necessary infrastructure and devices to deliver online assessments, the transition to computer-based testing should also be viewed in the context of the state’s new focus on technology-enhanced learning. Assessment-ready devices should be used not just during testing times; rather, they should be integrated into students’ overall learning experiences. One potential funding strategy is to redirect funds currently used for instructional technology to cover the costs of assessment technology. The state could also encourage public-private partnerships to match high-need districts with private business or philanthropic partners, or seek additional revenues through a statewide technology infrastructure bond.

PROMISING PRACTICES IN IMPLEMENTATION COSTS AND TECHNOLOGY

NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

In 2011, the Governor amended New York state law to allow districts greater flexibility in how they use instructional materials and how dollars are allocated for the purchase of those aids. New York state defines “instructional material aids” to include textbooks, library materials, computer software, and instructional computer hardware. Under the new provisions, a school district may spend more than its maximum allocation in any one of the areas by designating available aid in the other categories (with the exception of library materials aid). In other words, districts can use portions of state textbook aid for instructional software and hardware purchases.

RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

As a result of a preliminary survey of access to technology in schools across the state, officials in Rhode Island realized districts needed assistance to improve school infrastructure, specifically in securing bandwidth as well as the necessary equipment to provide wireless access to all classrooms (sufficient number of electrical outlets, wiring, and network controllers for instance). State education officials have proposed a $20 million Technology Infrastructure Bond to improve classroom and building infrastructure over the next three to five years. The Technology Bond is currently pending official inclusion in the governor’s budget and, later, legislative approval. There has been strong state leadership to prepare the proposal for the bond.

Lessons for California:

Technology costs can be mitigated by repurposing dollars and creatively generating new revenues, including capital bonds and/or public-private partnerships.
The state must also take an active role to ensure teacher preparation programs and credentialing requirements are aligned to support effective instruction of the CCSS. Given our state’s demographics, in which 95 percent of teachers teach one or more English learners, this is particularly true for the certification requirements governing the California Teacher of English Learner (CTEL) and English-Language Development (ELD) endorsements.24 The California Teacher Credentialing Commission (CTCC) should examine certification requirements to ensure alignment with the enhanced linguistic demands and shift in pedagogical practices required of the CCSS and the new ELD standards.25

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CCSS: CALIFORNIA’S PROGRESS TO DATE

Roughly a year and a half after the state adopted the standards, the State Board of Education approved the CCSS Systems Implementation Plan. (For a timeline, see Figure 1.) This plan identifies three major phases, culminating with full implementation of the CCSS in 2014-15:

- **PHASE 1**: Increase awareness of the CCSS, introduce the initial planning system to implement it, and establish ways to collaborate with interested parties.

- **PHASE 2**: Build resources, assess needs, establish new professional learning opportunities, and expand collaboration among stakeholders.

- **PHASE 3**: Implement new professional learning supports; fully align curriculum, instruction, and testing; and integrate these elements for all students.

In addition to the state-level plan, the CDE has advised districts to develop their own local plan for implementation based on specific needs and resources, using a template that suggests activities and describes resources that are available to help educators reach the implementation milestones.

On the legislative side, the Curriculum Support and Reform Act of 2011 (AB 250) aims to ensure school districts have as many standards-aligned instructional materials as possible, first by replacing the existing Curriculum Development and Supplemental Materials Commission with the Instructional Quality Commission (IQC).26 It tasks the IQC with recommending revised curriculum frameworks, or “classroom blueprints,” that are aligned to the CCSS, and developing criteria for the evaluation of instructional materials. AB 250 also requires the CDE to oversee the development of a set of 12-16 professional learning modules (PLMs) for teachers. These modules are intended to provide critical information and strategies to support educators in delivering curriculum aligned to the CCSS. More than a dozen PLMs are slated to be available before September 2013 (although 4 of the initial 5 have already been delayed), just one academic year before the CCSS assessments are scheduled for statewide rollout.

In addition, AB 1246 (2012) gives districts new authority to use instructional materials from the national market of instructional materials, but does not mandate them to purchase such materials.
OUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CALIFORNIA

1. The CDE must do a better job of communicating the shift in standards and expectations with teachers, parents, and community members across the state. The state must develop and implement a broad communication plan to prepare California’s diverse communities for CCSS implementation. CDE outreach has been minimal. They have posted a few resources for parents on their website.

   - The state should do more to engage community-based organizations in their outreach efforts, particularly to prepare communities for any changes in proficiency rates once the new assessments come online. Specifically, California could learn from other states, like Florida, that failed to effectively prepare the public when they introduced large-scale changes to their assessment system.

2. The state should provide access to high-quality professional development modules developed by local school systems, certify professional development providers, and employ a regional approach. Although the CDE posted a few online teacher training units this fall, for the most part, districts and schools are on their own when it comes to professional development.

   - To further aid districts, the state should disseminate information on model professional development plans from districts, charter management organizations (CMOs), counties, and other states.

   - The state should establish a certification process for professional development providers. This certification process should extend to county offices of education, nonprofits, school districts, consortia of districts, and CMOs. The process should include the opportunity for deep and meaningful feedback from districts, schools, and educators that is factored into an annual re-certification process.

3. The state should set rigorous quality standards that ensure instructional and supplemental materials are of the highest quality and fully aligned with the CCSS. With so many public and private interests vested in the proliferation of CCSS-aligned materials, the state must play a leadership role in this process, leveraging established evaluation criteria, such as the rubrics created by the Educators Evaluating Quality Instructional Products (EQuIP) collaborative. Employing these tools will better ensure high-quality, CCSS-aligned instructional and supplemental materials.

   - Further, the CDE should transform its website into a more interactive and user-friendly site that offers a resource-sharing portal.

   - Districts and counties should be encouraged to develop online clearingsouses of CCSS-aligned materials, and increasingly direct educators to state-certified sources of professional development and instructional materials. This way, both district and school leaders as well as teachers will be able to access the wealth of instructional tools being developed in California and throughout the nation, with assurances of quality control.

4. California can share the cost of CCSS implementation with other states, deploy cost-saving technologies, and provide critical funding through a statewide school bond focused on technology.

   - Because the CCSS have been adopted across the country, California can share many of the costs of implementation by collaborating with other states to develop the requisite instructional materials, professional development resources, and assessment systems.

   - Establishing priorities, aligning resources, thoughtfully repurposing funds, and looking for cost efficiencies as well as productivity gains, district and state leaders can achieve the digital conversion to support CCSS implementation and preparation for the new college- and career-ready assessments.

   - Given the budgetary challenges faced by the state, leaders must consider strategies such as redirecting funds, public-private partnerships, or school technology bond measures to fill the infrastructure, network, and device gaps.

5. California should align expectations in institutions of higher education with the new standards, particularly to streamline student placement decisions and improve teacher preparation programs. The CDE’s Implementation Plan declares intent to align institutions of higher education with the CCSS, but the CDE has done little to define any concrete action steps.

   - The CDE should partner with K-12 and higher education stakeholders to formalize agreements that integrate the CCSS into the state’s teacher preparation programs and credentialing requirements.

   - They should also work with the state’s university systems to define common standards for student placement in credit-bearing, non-remedial coursework upon admission to all public institutions of higher education.
6. To ensure continuous improvement, the legislature should require the CDE to contract for an independent multi-year evaluation of the CCSS implementation. This evaluation would inform stakeholders about the extent to which the standards are being effectively and equitably implemented in the state’s schools, and increase the urgency for state policymakers to improve the timely implementation of the standards. At the very least, the state should be surveying teachers on a regular basis to assess the availability and quality of supports.

**CONCLUSION**

California has more than a decade of experience to build on as it approaches the implementation of the next generation of academic standards. Given the benefits of the Common Core and the high stakes for students, the state can no longer pass the buck of responsibility to a few pioneering districts. In a time of tight budgets and reduced personnel, it is imperative now more than ever to leverage lessons learned from some of the states and districts profiled in this report to promote a broad, rigorous, and equitable implementation of the CCSS. Realizing the stakes for their students, schools, and communities, these leaders have forged ahead. It’s long past time for California’s leaders to catch up.

**CALL TO ACTION: WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP**

This brief focuses on the role of state policymakers, but communities, district and school leaders, and educators can also help accelerate CCSS implementation efforts across California.

**COMMUNITIES**

Demand more information from your school, district, and state leaders: Hold informational meetings for community members to help build broad understanding of what the transition to the CCSS means for your communities. Invite school, district, or state leaders to speak to groups of community members and advocate for clarity on their implementation plans, including the supports that will be offered to help students meet and educators teach to the raised expectations.

Engage parents: Parents need to know what the CCSS mean for their children. Identify and help disseminate resources that provide guidance to parents about what their children will be learning and how they can support that learning.

**DISTRICT & SCHOOL LEADERS**

Communication is key: Communicate how the CCSS fits with the rest of your college- and career-ready reform agenda, and how the standards address equity. Clearly communicate that rigorous content will be taught in every grade level and across content areas, so that every student is equipped to successfully compete with peers across the district, state, nation, and world.

Encourage teachers to become advocates of the CCSS: Identify a leadership corps of educators who can be trained in and lead the development and/or adaptation of CCSS-aligned instructional materials. Let educators do the talking for you; arm them with the tools they need to spread the word, share resources, and engage peers and parents in the new standards implementation.

**EDUCATORS**

Advocate for high-quality professional development: Recommend the type of professional development that will be necessary for successful implementation of the CCSS. Call for enhancing or replacing current professional development to align with the needs of CCSS implementation. A basic understanding of the goals and organization of the CCSS is not enough to drive instructional change.

Engage with your peers in the development and identification of high-quality resources: Collaborate with school and district peers to develop CCSS-aligned instructional materials and provide on-site support to other teachers. With your peers, evaluate resources, and identify high-quality instructional materials available from other states, districts, or other open-source materials.
The Education Trust—West works for the high academic achievement of all students at all levels, pre-k through college. We expose opportunity and achievement gaps that separate students of color and low-income students from other youth, and we identify and advocate for the strategies that will forever close those gaps.